

DESCRIPTION

EXTERNAL FORCE CONTROL METHOD, EXTERNAL FORCE CONTROL SYSTEM, AND EXTERNAL FORCE CONTROL PROGRAM

5 Technical Field

 The present invention relates to a method and system
for controlling an external force applied to an animal
through an orthosis attached to the animal that makes a
movement along with the activities of muscle fibers and a
10 program for providing a computer with the control
functions.

Background Art

 An external force applied to a person with the
15 purpose of walking aid is preferably controlled to an
appropriate one in relation to an internal force that
arises due to his or her will according to the progress of
rehabilitation exercise or the like. Therefore, it is
conceivable to measure a joint torque on the basis of a
20 myoelectric signal that occurs in a human body and to
apply a torque (external force) of an appropriate level
according to the joint torque to the person.

 Conventionally, there has been suggested a
technology of estimating a muscle force of a leg by an
25 output from a pressure sensor or the like attached to the
toe or heel of a sole and applying a support force to the
leg through the device attached to the leg for reducing a

load on muscles of the leg if the muscle force is greater than a reference value (for example, refer to paragraphs 0006 to 0012 and FIGS. 1 to 4 of Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 2004-105261). Moreover, there has been suggested a
5 technology of measuring a myoelectric signal that occurs in a human body and measuring a joint torque or the like of the animal concerned based on the myoelectric signal (for example, refer to paragraphs 0038 to 0062 of Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 2001-286451).

10 If there is any change in muscle fatigue degree or in the contact condition between electrodes and the body due to perspiration or the like, it is projected that the relation between the myoelectric signal and the joint torque changes even in the same person and that simply
15 adopting the conventional technologies does not provide a desired force applied to the person based on the myoelectric signal.

Therefore, the object of the present invention is to provide a method and system capable of controlling an
20 external force applied to an animal in such a way as to achieve as a target relation the relation between the external force and a motion variable varying with the motion of the animal and a program for providing a computer with the control functions.

25 Disclosure of the Invention

According to one aspect of the present invention to

resolve the above problem, there is provided an external force control method for controlling an external force applied to an animal through an orthosis attached to the animal that makes a movement along with the activities of muscle fibers, the method comprising: a myoelectric potential measurement step of measuring a myoelectric potential x that occurs in the body of the animal; an external force setting step of setting a value of an external force f applied to the animal through the orthosis according to an external force function $f(x)$ —with the myoelectric potential x as a variable on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential x ; a motion variable measurement step of measuring a motion variable y varying with the motion of the animal under the condition of the external force applied through the orthosis; a factor setting step of setting a value of a factor γ according to a factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ with the external force f and the motion variable y as variables on the basis of the set value of the external force f and the measured value of the motion variable y ; a determination step of determining whether a deviation δ between the set value of the factor γ and target thereof value γ_t is less than a reference value ε ; and an external force function setting step of setting a new external force function $f(x)$ in such a way that the set value of the factor γ approaches the target value γ_t if the deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than the reference value ε in the

determination step.

According to the external force control method of the present invention, the value of the external force f is set according to the external force function $f(x)$ on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential x and the external force applied to the animal is controlled through the orthosis according to the set value of the external force f . Moreover, the motion variable y varying with the motion of the animal is measured under the condition of the external force applied through the orthosis and the value of the factor γ is set according to a factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ on the basis of the set value of the external force f and the measured value of the motion variable y . Furthermore, it is determined whether the deviation δ between the set value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is less than the reference value ε . Then, if the deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than the reference value ε , a new external force function $f(x)$ is set in such a way that the set value of the factor γ approaches the target value γ_t . The deviation δ includes a deviation at a certain time point and a mean deviation or cumulative deviation at a plurality of time points or during a continuous time period. This controls the external force f in such a way that the value of the factor γ approaches the target value γ_t .

The factor γ set according to the factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ with the external force f and the motion variable y as

variables represents what kind of relation exists between the external force f and the motion variable y . In addition, the target value γ_t of the factor γ represents what kind of target relation exists between the external force f and the motion variable y .

Therefore, according to the external force control method of the present invention, it is possible to control the external force f on the basis of the myoelectric potential x in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the motion variable y approaches the target relation ($\gamma_t = \gamma(f, y)$), which is determined according to the factor target value γ_t , even if any change occurs in the myoelectric potential measurements of the animal.

The myoelectric potential x can be either one of a myoelectric potential or a combination of a plurality of myoelectric potentials $\{x_i | i=1, 2, \dots\}$. Furthermore, the external force f can be either one of an external force or a combination of a plurality of external forces $\{f_i | i=1, 2, \dots\}$. Still further, the motion variable y can be either one of the motion variable or a combination of a plurality of motion variables $\{y_i | i=1, 2, \dots\}$. Moreover, the factor γ can be either one of a factor or a combination of a plurality of factors $\{\gamma_i | i=1, 2, \dots\}$.

In the external force control method according to the present invention, the external force function setting step includes setting a value of a coefficient α that

represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force f and setting the external force function $f(x)$ according to a basic function $F(x, \alpha)$ with the myoelectric potential x and the coefficient α as
5 variables on the basis of the set value of the coefficient α .

According to the external force control method of the present invention, a new value is set for the coefficient α that represents the relation between the
10 myoelectric potential x and the external force f if the deviation between the set value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is equal to or greater than the reference value ε . Moreover, a new value is set for the external force function $f(x)$ according to the basic function $F(x, \alpha)$ on the basis of the new set value of the coefficient α .
15 Thereafter, the external force f applied to the animal is set according to the new external force function $f(x)$ on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential x . This enables the external force f to be
20 controlled based on the measured value of the myoelectric potential x in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the motion variable y approaches the target relation on the basis of the latest relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force
25 f even if any change occurs in the myoelectric potential measurements of the animal. The coefficient α can be either one of a coefficient or a combination of a

plurality of coefficients $\{\alpha_i | i=1, 2, \dots\}$.

Furthermore, in the external force control method according to the present invention, the external force function setting step includes finding the external force target value f_t according to the factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ on the basis of the measured value of the motion variable y and the target value γ_t of the factor γ and setting the external force function $f(x)$ in such a way that the external force f approaches the external force target value f_t .

According to the external force control method of the present invention, the external force f set based on the myoelectric potential x and applied to the animal can be controlled in such a way as to approach the target value f_t responsive to the target relation ($\gamma_t = \gamma(f, y)$), which depends on the target value γ_t of the factor γ , even if any change occurs in the myoelectric potential measurements of the animal.

Furthermore, in the external force control method according to the present invention, the external force function setting step includes setting the external force function $f(x)$ in such a way that a maximum measured value of the external force f approaches a maximum value of the external force target value f_t .

According to the external force control method of the present invention, the external force f applied to the animal can be controlled in such a way that the maximum

measured value of the external force f approaches the maximum value of the target value f_t . The "maximum value" of the measured value of the external force f and of the target value f_t respectively includes the maximum value during a certain time zone and further the maximum value of the measured value of the external force f and of the target value f_t in each period in the case of a periodic variation in the measured value of the external force f and in the target value f_t .

Furthermore, in the external force control method according to the present invention, the determination step is omitted and the external force function setting step is performed after the first external force setting step.

According to the external force control method of the present invention, the new external force function $f(x)$ is set without passing through the determination in view of the fact that it is highly probable that the first set value of the external force f is far from the target relation between the external force f and the motion variable y since the first external force function $f(x)$ does not yet reflect the actual relation between the external force f and the motion variable y . This enables the external force f to be controlled in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the motion variable y rapidly approaches the target relation.

Still further, in the external force control method according to the present invention, the motion variable

measurement step includes measuring the resultant force of an internal force and an external force of the animal as the motion variable y and the factor setting step includes setting the ratio of the external force f to the resultant force of the internal force and the external force of the animal as the factor γ ($0 \leq \gamma < 1$).

Furthermore, in the external force control method according to the present invention, the motion variable measurement step includes measuring a primitive motion variable varying with the motion of the animal and measuring the motion variable according to the inverse dynamics model that represents the behaviors of the animal on the basis of the measured value of the primitive motion variable.

Furthermore, the external force control method according to the present invention further includes a motion state determination step of determining the motion state of the animal according to a given correspondence between the primitive motion variable and the motion state of the animal on the basis of the measured value of the primitive motion variable after measuring the primitive motion variable varying with the motion of the animal, wherein the motion variable measurement step includes measuring the motion variable y according to a given correspondence between the motion state of the animal and the motion variable on the basis of the motion state determined in the motion state determination step.

Furthermore, the external force control method according to the present invention further includes a step of measuring the external force f , wherein the factor setting step includes setting a value of the factor γ according to the factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ with the external force f and the motion variable y as variables on the basis of the measured value of the external force f , instead of the set value of the external force f , and the measured value of the motion variable y .

According to the external force control method of the present invention, the factor γ is set on the basis of the measured value of the external force f , and therefore it is possible to control the external force f applied to the animal after removing the effect of the deviation that may occur in the measured value of the external force f from the set value of the external force f .

Furthermore, the external force control method according to the present invention further includes a motion state determination step of determining the motion state of the animal according to the given correspondence between the primitive motion variable and the motion state of the animal on the basis of the measured value of the primitive motion variable after measuring the primitive motion variable varying with the motion of the animal, wherein the external force function setting step includes setting a new external force function $f(x)$ responsive to each motion state determined in the motion state

determination step.

Furthermore, in the external force control method according to the present invention further, the determination step includes determining whether the
5 deviation δ is less than the reference value ε on the basis of the factor target value γ_t set for each motion state according to the motion state determined in the motion state determination step and the external force function setting step includes setting a new external force
10 function $f(x)$ on the basis of the factor target value γ_t set for each motion state according to the motion state determined in the motion state determination step.

According to the external force control method of the present invention, it is possible to achieve the
15 appropriate external force f , which is set in the external force setting step and applied to the body of the animal with consideration given to the motion state of the animal.

Furthermore, in the external force control method of the present invention, the determination step includes
20 determining whether the deviation δ is less than a threshold ε according to the threshold ε depending on whether the deviation δ is positive or negative.

According to the external force control method of the present invention, it is possible to control the
25 external force f in such a way that if the instability level of the motion of the animal undergoing the external force f depends on whether the deviation δ between the set

value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is positive or negative, the motion of the animal is stable with consideration given to the difference between them.

According to another aspect of the present invention
5 to resolve the above problem, there is provided an external force control system for controlling an external force applied to an animal through an orthosis attached to the animal that makes a movement along with the activities of muscle fibers, the system comprising: myoelectric
10 potential measurement means for measuring a myoelectric potential x that occurs in the body of the animal; external force setting means for setting a value of an external force f applied to the animal through the orthosis according to an external force function $f(x)$ -
15 with the myoelectric potential x as a variable on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential x measured by the myoelectric potential measurement means; motion variable measurement means for measuring a motion variable y varying with the motion of the animal under the
20 condition of the external force applied through the orthosis; factor setting means for setting a value of a factor γ according to a factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ with the external force f and the motion variable y as variables on the basis of the set value of the external force f set by
25 the external force setting means and the measured value of the motion variable y measured by the motion variable measurement means; determination means for determining

whether a deviation δ between the set value of the factor γ set by the factor setting means and target value γ_t thereof is less than a reference value ε ; and external force function setting means for setting a new external force function $f(x)$ in such a way that the set value of the factor γ approaches its target value γ_t if the deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than the reference value ε by the determination means.

According to the external force control system of the present invention, it is possible to control the external force f based on the myoelectric potential x in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the motion variable y approaches the target relation ($\gamma_t = \gamma(f, y)$), which is determined according to the factor target value γ_t , even if any change occurs in the myoelectric potential measurements of the animal.

According to still another aspect of the present invention to resolve the above problem, there is provided an external force control program for providing a computer with functions for controlling an external force applied to an animal through an orthosis attached to the animal that makes a movement along with the activities of muscle fibers, the program providing a computer with: a myoelectric potential measurement function of measuring a myoelectric potential x that occurs in the body of the animal; an external force setting function of setting a value of an external force f applied to the animal through

the orthosis according to an external force function $f(x)$ -
with the myoelectric potential x as a variable on the
basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential
 x ; a motion variable measurement function of measuring a
5 motion variable y varying with the motion of the animal
under the condition of the external force applied through
the orthosis; a factor setting function of setting a value
of a factor γ according to a factor function $\gamma(f, y)$ with
the external force f and the motion variable y as
10 variables on the basis of the set value of the external
force f and the measured value of the motion variable y ; a
determination function of determining whether a deviation δ
between the set value of the factor γ and target value γ_t
thereof is less than a reference value ε ; and an external
15 force function setting function of setting a new external
force function $f(x)$ in such a way that the set value of
the factor γ approaches its target value γ_t if the
deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than
the reference value ε by the determination function.

20 According to the external force control program of
the present invention, it is possible to provide the
computer with the functions for controlling the external
force f based on the myoelectric potential x in such a way
that the relation between the external force f and the
25 motion variable y approaches the target relation ($\gamma_t = \gamma(f, y)$)
determined according to the factor target value γ_t ,
even if any change occurs in the myoelectric potential

measurements of the animal.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a configuration explanatory view of an
5 external force control system according to one embodiment
of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an explanatory view of a myoelectric
potential measuring method;

FIG. 3 is an explanatory diagram for external force
10 control method according to one embodiment of the present
invention;

FIG. 4 is an explanatory diagram of an experimental
result of the external force control method according to
one embodiment of the present invention;

15 FIG. 5 is a configuration explanatory view of an
external force control system according to another
embodiment of the present invention;

Best Mode for Carrying out the Invention

20 Preferred embodiments of an external force control
method, an external force control system, and an external
force control program according to the present invention
will be described by using the accompanying drawings.

The following describes the configuration of the
25 external force control system in one embodiment of the
present invention with reference to FIG. 1 and FIG. 2.

An external force control system 100 shown in FIG. 1

controls external torques (external forces) around the knee joints of a person (animal) applied to both left and right legs through orthoses 222 attached to the thigh and crus of the legs by means of motors (engines) 220 disposed on the person's left and right knees, respectively. The motors 220 work with a battery 200 as a power supply, which is contained in a case 202 attached to the waist.

The external force control system 100 includes a myoelectric potential measurement unit 110, a resultant force measurement unit (motion variable measurement means) 120, a factor setting unit 130, a determination unit 140, an external force function setting unit 150, an external force setting unit 160, and a motor current control unit 170. Each unit is made up of a computer 10 including a CPU as hardware, a memory such as an EEPROM or RAM, an I/O circuit and "an external force control program" of the present invention stored in the memory as software. The computer 10 works with the battery 200 as a power supply and is contained in the case 202.

The myoelectric potential measurement unit 110 measures a myoelectric potential x through extensor surface electrodes 111, each of which are attached to a region of a vastus medialis, a vastus lateralis, and a rectus femoris (extensor) on the surface of the human body as shown in FIG. 2(a) and flexor surface electrodes 112, each of which are attached to a region of a semitendinosus and a biceps femoris (flexor) on the surface of the human

body as shown in FIG. 2(b).

The resultant force measurement unit 120 includes a chest gyro sensor 121 for outputting a signal responsive to a tilt angular velocity of a human chest, an
5 anteroposterior chest acceleration sensor 122 for outputting a signal responsive to an anteroposterior acceleration of the chest, a waist gyro sensor 123 for outputting a signal responsive to a tilt angular velocity of the waist, an anteroposterior waist acceleration sensor
10 124 for outputting a signal responsive to an anteroposterior acceleration of the waist, a vertical waist acceleration sensor 125 for outputting a signal responsive to a vertical acceleration of the waist, a hip joint angle sensor 126 for outputting a signal responsive
15 to a flexion angle of a hip joint, and a knee joint angle sensor 127 for outputting a signal responsive to a flexion angle of a knee joint. The resultant force measurement unit 120 measures a resultant force F , which is the sum of an internal torque (internal force) around the knee joint
20 that arises in the leg due to the person's will and an external torque (external force) around the knee joint given to the leg by the motor 220 disposed to the knee portion, as "a motion variable" on the basis of outputs from the sensors 121 to 127 and measured values of
25 "primitive motion variables" such as a tilt angular velocity of the human chest or the like by using an inverse dynamics model that represents human behaviors.

The power of the motor 220 is supplied to each leg through rigid members 224 connected to the motor 220 and extended upwardly and downwardly from the knee portion respectively, supporters (orthoses) 222 connected to the rigid members
5 224 and attached to the thigh portion and the crus portion, respectively, and a shoe 226 connected to the rigid member 224 extended downwardly from the knee portion. The inverse dynamics model is stored in the memory of the computer 10.

As shown in FIG. 5, it is also possible to provide a
10 floor reaction force sensor 128 for outputting a signal responsive to a floor reaction force applied to the sole of foot at the bottom of the shoe 226 with the omission of the sensors 121 to 125 in order to measure the resultant force F according to the inverse dynamics model on the
15 basis of the outputs from the hip joint angle sensor 126, the knee joint angle sensor 127, and the floor reaction force sensor 128.

The factor setting unit 130 sets the factor γ according to the factor function $\gamma(f, F)$ with the external
20 force f and the resultant force (motion variable) F as variables on the basis of the set value of the external force f set by the external force setting unit 160 and the measured value of the resultant force F measured by the resultant force measurement unit 120.

25 The determination unit 140 determines whether the deviation δ between the measured value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is less than a threshold ε (>0). The

target value γ_t of the factor γ is stored in the memory of the computer 10. The target value γ_t of the factor γ can be adjusted according to a person's (user's) intention through buttons (not shown) provided in the case 202.

5 The external force function setting unit 150 sets an external force target value f_t as the product of a measured value of the resultant force F and the factor target value γ_t and sets a coefficient α that represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force
10 f in such a way that the set value of the external force f is coincident with the external force target value f_t . Moreover, the external force function setting unit 150 sets an external force function $f(x)$, which is a function of the myoelectric potential x , according to a basic
15 function $F(x, \alpha, \gamma)$ on the basis of the set value of the factor γ set by the factor setting unit 130 and the set value of the coefficient α .

 The external force setting unit 160 sets the external force f according to the latest external force
20 function $f(x)$ set by the external force function setting unit 150 on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential x measured by the myoelectric potential measurement unit 110.

 The motor current control unit 170 controls the
25 external force f applied to each leg through the orthosis 222 from the motor 220 by controlling supply current from the battery 200 to the motor 220 according to the set

value of the external force f set by the external force setting unit 160.

The following describes the external force control method performed by the external force control system 100 having the above configuration with reference to FIG. 3 and FIG. 4.

First, the control is started by OFF-to-ON switching of an ON/OFF switch (not shown) provided in the case 202. Thereby, the number of times n in setting the external force function $f(x)$ is reset to "0" (S1) and the measurement time t of a timer (not shown) is reset to "0" (S2).

Furthermore, the myoelectric potential measurement unit 110 measures the value of the myoelectric potential x generated by the activities of the muscle fibers and varied along with the human locomotion or the like through the extensor surface electrodes 111 and the flexor surface electrodes 112 (S3). The myoelectric potential x includes an extensor potential x_{i+} ($i=1$ (vastus medialis), 2 (vastus lateralis), 3 (rectus femoris)) measured through the extensor surface electrodes 111 and a flexor potential x_{j-} ($j=1$ (semitendinosus), 2 (biceps femoris)) measured through the flexor surface electrodes 112. The measured values of the extensor potential x_{i+} and the flexor potential x_{j-} measured by the myoelectric potential measurement unit 110 are obtained by A/D-converting myoelectric signals detected by the extensor surface

electrodes 111 and the flexor surface electrodes 112 after passing through a filter and an amplifier, converting them into absolute values, and passing them through a lowpass filter.

5 Furthermore, the external force setting unit 160 sets the external force f according to the external force function $f(x)$ with the myoelectric potential x as a variable on the basis of the measured value of the myoelectric potential $x=(x_{1+}, x_{2+}, x_{3+}, x_{1-}, x_{2-})$ (S4). The
10 first external force function $f(x)$ is preset as shown in the following expression (1) on the basis of the empirical rule or the like and stored in the memory of the computer 10.

$$\begin{aligned} f(x) &= h(x, \alpha) \gamma_t \\ 15 \quad &= (\sum_i \alpha_{i+} x_{i+} MA_{i+} + \sum_j \alpha_{j-} x_{j-} MA_{j-}) \gamma_t \dots (1) \end{aligned}$$

 In the expression (1), the coefficient $\alpha=(\alpha_{1+}, \alpha_{2+}, \alpha_{3+}, \alpha_{1-}, \alpha_{2-})$ represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force f . The coefficients α_{i+} and α_{j-} are reverse in sign and the ratio
20 between them is set such that the expression $\alpha_{i+}:\alpha_{j-}=1:-1/3$ is satisfied. MA_{i+} is a moment arm of the extensor, in other words, a distance between the center of rotation of the joint and the position where the extensor is attached to the bone and varies with the flexion angle of the joint.
25 Similarly, MA_{j-} is a moment arm of the flexor, in other words, a distance between the center of rotation of the joint and the position where the flexor is attached to the

bone and varies with the flexion angle of the joint. The extensor moment arm MA_{i+} can be supposed to be equivalent to the flexor moment arm MA_{j-} .

Furthermore, the motor current control unit 170
5 controls the current I of the motor 220 according to the set value of the external force f set by the external force setting unit 160 (S5). This transmits the power of the motor 220 through the orthosis 222 and applies an external force (an external torque around the knee joint)
10 f coincident with the set value to each human leg.

Moreover, the resultant force measurement unit 120 measures the resultant force F , namely, the sum of the internal torque and the external torque around the knee joint by using the inverse dynamics model that represents
15 the human behaviors on the basis of the measured values of the primitive motion variables obtained by the sensors 121 to 127, more specifically, the tilt angle and the anteroposterior acceleration of the chest, the tilt angle of the waist, the anteroposterior acceleration and the
20 vertical acceleration of the waist, the hip joint angle, and the knee joint angle (S6). Since the method of measuring the resultant force F using the inverse dynamics model is available only by adopting a method disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 2003-89083 or the like, its
25 detailed description is omitted here. The resultant force F is defined with the direction of knee joint extension or the direction of moving the crus forward as positive.

Moreover, the factor setting unit 130 determines whether the timer measurement time t is equal to or greater than given time t_n . The given time t_n can depend on the number of times n in setting the external force function $f(x)$ such that t_0 is longer than t_1 ($i \neq 0$) or t_0 is shorter than t_1 ($i \neq 0$) or can be constant independently of the number of times n . If the time t is determined to be less than the given time t_n (S7: NO), the measurement of the myoelectric potential x (S3), the setting of the external force f (S4), the control of the motor current (S5), and the measurement of the resultant force F (S6) are performed repeatedly. On the other hand, if the time t is determined to reach the given time t_n (S7: YES), the factor setting unit 130 sets the factor γ according to the factor function $\gamma(f, F)$ represented by the following expression (2) on the basis of the set value of the external force f (See S4) and the measured value of the resultant force F (See S6) (S8).

$$\gamma(f, F) = f/F \dots (2)$$

The factor γ set according to the expression (2) determines the external force f applied to the human leg when the resultant force F is generated and can be referred to as "an assist ratio" because the external force f assists the motion.

Furthermore, the determination unit 140 determines whether the cumulative number of times n in setting the external force function $f(x)$ is zero (S9). If the number

of times n is determined to be zero (S9: YES), the external force function setting unit 150 sets the external force target value f_t (S11), sets the coefficient α that represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force f (S12), and sets the external force function $f(x)$ (S13).

On the other hand, unless the number of times n is determined to be zero (S9: NO), the determination unit 140 determines whether or not the deviation δ between the set value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is equal to or greater than the threshold ε (>0) (S10 (determination step)): if the deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than the threshold ε (S10: YES), the external force function setting unit 150 sets the external force target value f_t (S11), sets the coefficient α that represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force f (S12), and sets the external force function $f(x)$ (S13). The deviation δ can include a deviation at a single time point and a mean deviation or cumulative deviation at a plurality of time points or during a continuous time period.

More specifically, the external force function setting unit 150 sets the external force target value f_t as the product of the measured value F of the resultant force (motion variable) F and the factor target value γ_t (S11). Moreover, the external force function setting unit 150 sets the coefficient $\alpha=(\alpha_{1+}, \alpha_{2+}, \alpha_{3+}, \alpha_{1-}, \alpha_{2-})$ in such a way

that the maximum set value of the external force f (See S4) is coincident with the maximum value f_{tmax} of the external force target value f_t (See S11), in other words, that the equation represented by the following expression (3) is satisfied by using the measured value of the myoelectric potential x obtained when the set value of the external force f is the maximum and the measured value of the factor γ (S12).

$$f_{tmax} = (\sum_i \alpha_i \cdot x_i \cdot MA_{i+} + \sum_j \alpha_j \cdot x_j \cdot MA_{j-}) \gamma_t / (1 - \gamma) \dots (3)$$

Thereafter, the external force function setting unit 150 sets the external force function $f(x)$ according to the basic function $F(x, \alpha, \gamma)$ represented by the following expression (4) on the basis of the set value of the coefficient α and the measured value of the factor γ (S13).

$$\begin{aligned} F(x, \alpha, \gamma) \\ &= h(x, \alpha) \gamma_t / (1 - \gamma) \\ &= (\sum_i \alpha_i \cdot x_i \cdot MA_{i+} + \sum_j \alpha_j \cdot x_j \cdot MA_{j-}) \gamma_t / (1 - \gamma) \dots (4) \end{aligned}$$

After the setting of the external force function $f(x)$, the setting number of times n is incremented by one (S14). Unless the ON/OFF switch (not shown) is switched from ON to OFF (S15: NO), the timer measurement time t is reset to zero (S2) and the measurement of the myoelectric potential x (S3) and subsequent processing are performed repeatedly.

According to the experimental result of the external force control method shown in FIG. 4, it has been shown that the set value (dashed line) of the external force f

immediately after starting the control gradually approaches the external force target value f_t (solid line) by the setting of the external force function $f(x)$ (S12).

According to the external force control system 100 that performs the external force control method, the external force function $f(x)$ is set in such a way that the set value of the external force f (See S4) is coincident with the external force target value f_t (See S11) if the deviation δ is determined to be equal to or greater than the reference value ε (S10: YES) (S13). Moreover, the external force function $f(x)$ is set according to the basic function $F(x, \alpha, \gamma)$ (See expression (4)) on the basis of the set value of the factor γ (See S8) that represents the relation between the external force f and the resultant force F and the set value of the coefficient α (See S12) that represents the relation between the myoelectric potential x and the external force f . This enables the control of the external force f based on the myoelectric potential x in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the resultant force F is coincident with the target relation ($\gamma_t = \gamma(f, F) = f/F$), which depends on the factor target value γ_t , on the basis of the latest relation among the myoelectric potential x , the external force f , and the resultant force F , even if any change occurs in the contact condition or the like between the surface electrodes 111 and 112 and the leg.

Moreover, the first external force function $f(x)$

does not yet reflect the actual relation between the external force f and the resultant force F . Therefore, in view of the fact that it is highly probable that the first set value of the external force f is far from the target relation between the external force f and the resultant force F , the external force function $f(x)$ is set with the omission of the determination step (S10) if the number of times n in setting the external force function $f(x)$ is "0." This enables the control of the external force f in such a way that the relation between the external force f and the resultant force F rapidly approaches the target relation.

In this embodiment, the animal as a target of the external force control has been a human being. In another embodiment, however, the animal can be any of all kinds of animals that make a movement along with the muscle fibers such as mammals including a monkey and a giraffe or fishes.

In this embodiment, the plurality of (three) extensor potentials x_{i+} and the plurality of (two) flexor potentials x_{j-} have been measured. In another embodiment, however, it is also possible to measure one extensor potential x_+ and one flexor potential x_- , to measure a plurality of extensor potentials x_{i+} and one flexor potential x_- , or to measure one extensor potential x_+ and a plurality of flexor potentials x_{j-} . Moreover, the function $h(x, \alpha)$ included in the expressions (1) and (4) in each of these three alternative embodiments can be defined by the

following expressions (5) to (7).

$$h(x, \alpha) \equiv \alpha_+ x_+ MA_+ + \alpha_- x_- MA_- \dots (5)$$

$$h(x, \alpha) \equiv \sum_i \alpha_{i+} x_{i+} MA_{i+} + \alpha_- x_- MA_- \dots (6)$$

$$h(x, \alpha) \equiv \alpha_+ x_+ MA_+ + \sum_j \alpha_{j-} x_{j-} MA_{j-} \dots (7)$$

5 Moreover, in this embodiment, the resultant force
measurement unit 120 has measured the resultant force F as
a motion variable, in other words, the sum of an internal
force (a human voluntary knee joint torque) and the
external force (a knee joint torque applied to the human
10 leg) (See S6) on the basis of the outputs from the knee
joint angle sensor 127 or the like and the "primitive
motion variables" such as the knee joint angle and the
angular velocity. In another embodiment, however, the
resultant force measurement unit 120 can measure the
15 external force F (motion variable) in various methods such
as by measuring the external force F based on images
captured by a camera (not shown) for taking photographs of
human movements.

 In this embodiment, the resultant force F, which is
20 the sum of the internal torque (internal force) around the
knee joint that arises in the leg due to the person's will
and the external torque (external force) around the knee
joint applied to the leg through the orthoses 222 by the
motor 220, has been measured as "the motion variable." In
25 another embodiment, however, it is also possible to
measure a resultant torque of an internal torque and an
external torque around a joint other than a hip joint, an

ankle joint, an elbow joint, a shoulder joint and a knee joint, the rate of change in a joint angle such as a knee joint, joint angular velocity, joint angular acceleration, or joint torque, or any combination thereof as "the motion variable."

In this embodiment, the factor γ has been set (calculated) according to the factor function $\gamma(f, F)=f/F$ in the form of the expression (2) (S8). In another embodiment, however, the factor γ can be set according to the factor function $\gamma(f, F)$ of the external force f and the resultant force F in a different form from the above.

In this embodiment, the set value of the external force f has been used (See S4) at the setting of the factor γ (S8). In another embodiment, however, it is possible to measure the external force f based on an output from a strain gauge (not shown) attached to the orthosis 222 or an output from a current sensor (not shown) for measuring current of the motor 220 or the like and to use the measured value of the external force f at the setting of the factor γ . According to another embodiment, the factor γ is set on the basis of the measured value of the external force f , and therefore it is possible to control the external force f applied to each of the human legs after removing the effect of the deviation that may occur in the measured value of the external force f from the set value of the external force f .

In this embodiment, the factor γ has been set (calculated) whenever the timer measurement time t reaches the given time t_n (See S7 and S8). In another embodiment, however, the external force control system 100 may include
5 a vertical leg acceleration sensor for outputting a signal responsive to the vertical acceleration of the lower part of the leg and a counter for counting the number of times in the leg reaching the ground on the basis of the output from the vertical leg acceleration sensor, and the factor
10 setting unit 130 may set (calculate) the factor γ whenever the counting number of times with the counter reaches a given number of times.

In this embodiment, the determination step (S10) has been omitted if the number of times n in setting the
15 external force function $f(x)$ is zero. In another embodiment, however, the determination step may be performed independently of the number of times n (even if the number of times n is zero).

In this embodiment, the coefficient α has been set
20 in such a way that the maximum set value of the external force f is coincident with the maximum value f_{tmax} of the external force target value f_t (See S11 and S12). In another embodiment, however, the coefficient α may be set in such a way that the mean value or cumulative value of
25 the set value of the external force f during a certain time period or at a plurality of time points is coincident with the mean value or cumulative value of the external

force target value f_t during the certain time period or at the plurality of time points.

In still another embodiment of the present invention, it is possible to omit the chest gyro sensor 121, the
5 anteroposterior chest acceleration sensor 122, the waist gyro sensor 103, the anteroposterior waist acceleration sensor 124 and the vertical waist acceleration sensor 125. In addition, the external force control system 100 may include a motion state determination unit for determining
10 the human motion state on the basis of the output from the hip joint angle sensor 126 and an output from the knee joint angle sensor 127, and the resultant force measurement unit 120 may read (measure) the resultant force F stored in the memory with being associated with
15 the motion state determined by the motion state determination unit on the basis of the motion state.

In another embodiment described above, a concrete determination method of the motion state is available only by adopting a method disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-
20 Open No. 2003-116893. Therefore, its detailed description is omitted here. The motion state determination unit determines which is the human motion state among a plurality of motion states including "a level walking state" where a person is walking on a level ground or on a
25 sloping ground whose slope is vanishingly gentle, "a downward walking state" where the person is descending stairs or a sloping road, "an upward walking state" where

the person is ascending stairs or a sloping road, "a rise-from-chair state" where the person is rising from a chair, and "a sit-on-chair state" where the person is sitting on a chair from a standing position.

5 In still another embodiment of the present invention, the external force control system 100 may include a motion state determination unit to set the external force function $f(x)$ according to a basic function $F(x, \alpha, \gamma)$ set for each motion state based on the motion state determined
10 by the motion state determination unit and stored in the memory (S12). Moreover, in further another embodiment, the external force control system 100 may include a motion state determination unit, the determination unit 140 may make determination on the basis of the factor target value
15 γ_t set for each motion state based on the motion state determined by the motion state determination unit and stored in the memory (S10), and the external force function setting unit 150 may set the external force function $f(x)$ after setting the coefficient α on the basis
20 of the factor target value γ_t set for each motion state according to the motion state determined by the motion state determination unit (S11, S12).

 According to the above embodiment, it is possible to achieve the appropriate external force f applied to a
25 user's leg with consideration given to the user's (human) motion state.

 In still another embodiment of the present invention,

the determination unit 140 may determine whether the deviation δ is less than the threshold ε according to the threshold ε that depends on the difference between positive or negative in the deviation δ . According to another
5 embodiment described above, it is possible to control the external force f in such a way that if the instability level of the motion of the animal undergoing the external force f depends on whether the deviation δ between the set value of the factor γ and its target value γ_t is positive
10 or negative, the motion of the animal is stable with consideration given to the difference between them.